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Kelly pushes middle-class college tuition aid

Congresswoman speaks at Marist

By Erikah Haavie
Poughkeepsie Journal

When Christine Gonsior graduates from Marist College next year, she could spend the next decade paying off student loans.

If she continues on to graduate school, she'll have to pay her own way.

"The cost was a big factor in where I could go to school," said Gonsior, 20.

A new bill by U.S. Rep. Sue Kelly, R-Katonah, seeks to help students and their parents cope with the increasing costs of college tuition.

The bill, known as the "More Money for College Act," would allow students or parents to deduct all tuition costs on their federal income taxes, whether they're starting out at Dutchess Community College or finishing a program at Vassar College.

"What you pay is what you deduct," Kelly said.

It's a bill that's "focused for the middle class," said Kelly, who held a press conference Monday at Marist College.

Harder for middle class

Low-income families are often able to get scholarships and financial aid, but it's more difficult for those from the middle classes, with incomes of \$60,000 or so, she said.

Kelly said she and her husband put three children through college at

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the same time.

Paying tuition costs is a "tremendous burden for people who work," she said. "I want people to be able to afford college."

Gonsior said her parents made it possible for her to attend Marist by taking out a number of loans. Her sister, a senior in high school, may also attend Marist next year.

"This would definitely help our parents," Gonsior said. "I think it's a really good plan."

Kelly is seeking other sponsors for the bill, which will first go before the education and ways and means committees. There is no companion bill in the Senate.

The bill does not cover the price of books, room and board or other costs.

Several other college-tuition relief bills are on the table in Congress.

Kelly said her bill is unique in that it's not limited to undergraduate or vocational programs, but includes graduate programs and any college tuition.

"It's elegantly simple," since the bill applies to traditional students 22 years old and under, and to adult learners returning to college, Marist President Dennis Murray said.

Murray said he hopes it will make college more accessible for more individuals who want to improve their skills.

"I hope this would encourage people to go back to college," Kelly said.

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